

The Final Chapter:

On December 15, 2000, USARSA closed its doors after a dignified ceremony before Ridgway Hall at Fort Benning. USARSA trained 45,331 students while located in Panama and an additional 14,540 students during the final 15 years at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Helicopter School Battalion counts 1861 trained students under the USARSA flag.¹⁰⁰ Louis Caldera, Secretary of the Army, explained that “the decision to close the US Army School of the Americas was a difficult one because the school and its graduates have done so much to foster a spirit of cooperation throughout the hemisphere. But as our region turns to face the new challenges of the 21st Century, it is time to move forward by closing one successful chapter in the story of our cooperation and mutual interchange, and open a new and different one. This new institute will provide the necessary training to assist the nations of Latin America to fulfill their peace process commitments and to help democracy take root and flourish in this new century.”¹⁰¹ The defeat of the Communist revolution and the dramatic transition to civilian democracies throughout the hemisphere are testimony to the long-term efforts of the soldiers, statesmen, and diplomats who emulated the motto of the U.S. Army School of the Americas through the difficult years of the Cold War and its immediate aftermath –

UNO PARA TODOS Y TODOS PARA UNO



The last Command and General Staff Officer Course to graduate from the U.S. Army School of the Americas -- 8 December 2000.



Mr. Leuer is a 1982 graduate of the now defunct Balboa High School, Republic of Panama. He received his BA in Natural Science from St. John's University at Collegeville, Minnesota in 1986. Upon graduation, Mr. Leuer served as a volunteer in the U.S. Peace Corps in Guatemala, Central America. Mr. Leuer returned to the U.S. and, in 1988, entered the civil service joining the staff of the U.S. Army School of the Americas. He currently serves as the Chief of Training Management Division. In 1992, Mr. Leuer was awarded a Master's degree in International Relations from Troy State University, Troy, Alabama. Since 1995, he has been an Adjunct Professor of Political Science for the university systems of both Georgia and Alabama.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to this story. The valuable input of these individuals helped make this work a much better account than the one that originally flowed from my pen.

First, I would like to thank those former commandants who responded to my query for information concerning their tenures and who validated what I had written about them. Col. Cecil Himes provided pictures from his personal archives and offered additional details concerning the commandant's role while the school was in Panama. Brig. Gen. Henry Muller provided clear insight into the politically charged atmosphere existing while he was commanding the school. Col. "Biff" DePalo, now a Ph.D., was helpful during the editing of the final draft and ensured that his role was properly chronicled. Col. Jose Feliciano's support for this endeavor helped clarify certain details that were not completely documented. Col. Roy Trumble personally dropped by to discuss the friction-filled period of his reign to ensure the story would be recounted accurately.

Special commendation goes to Col. Glenn Weidner as he was responsible for assigning me the mission and giving me the time to write this story. He was instrumental in editing the story and providing the appropriate words to convey the right message. He also contributed greatly to telling the history of the school from his knowledge base and experiences while working in the Inter-American defense system. Col. Ken LaPlante, working on the Army Staff, facilitated efforts to gain consent for the publication of this account and provided information concerning his long-standing association with the school.

No history of USARSA would be complete without the input of the long-time civilian employees that have served, dutifully, since the beginning. Mr. Walter Santamaría's input allowed me to add color to the story, while Mr. Mauricio Lawson's expert knowledge of the Panama Canal area helped clarify many facts and provided little-known details. Their work, and that of the other professional translators at the school, has allowed this story to be told in both English and Spanish in order to reach our Latin American audience as well.

I thank my long time "Zonian" counterpart and friend, Gus Miskovsky, who provided much needed focus when describing the early years of Panama and the development of the canal. Also deserving of thanks is Ms. Amanda Sallese who proofread the initial version and helped me develop the tempo and style of the story.

I would also like to thank any others who have had a part in preparing this story. Success is seldom through one's singular or isolated efforts, and all contributions have been duly noted. I hope this exposé assists the reader in gaining a better understanding of the U.S. Army School of the Americas and its role in United States-Latin American affairs.

Joe Leuer
October 24, 2000

END NOTES

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**THE UNITED STATES ARMY
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HONORS THE CONTRIBUTIONS
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FOR YOUR OUTSTANDING DEVOTION
TO DUTY SINCE THE INITIAL DAYS
OF THIS GREAT INSTITUTION.**

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THAT HAS ALLOWED
OUR INSTITUTION TO ACCOMPLISH
ITS MISSION TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS.**

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DE BUENA VECINDAD

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POR NUESTRA LIBERTAD

POR NUESTRA LIBERTAD
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UN SIMBOLO DE PAZ ALUMBRARA EL VIVIR
DE TODO EL CONTINENTE AMERICANO

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FUERZA DE HERMANDAD

SERA ESTE EL CANTO DE BUENA VECINDAD
ARGENTINA, BRASIL Y BOLIVIA

COLOMBIA, CHILE Y ECUADOR
URUGUAY, VENEZUELA, HONDURAS

GUATEMALA Y EL SALVADOR
COSTA RICA Y NICARAGUA

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